



Biden nominates Jackson, first Black woman, to Supreme Court

By COLLEEN LONG,
MICHAEL BALSAMO and
ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday nominated federal appeals court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court, making her the first Black woman selected to serve on a court that once declared her race unworthy of citizenship and endorsed segregation. Introducing Jackson, Biden called her a "proven consensus builder" who has "a pragmatic understanding that the law must work for the American people." "She strives to be fair, to get it right, to do justice," the president added.

In Jackson, Biden delivers

on a campaign promise to make the historic appointment and to further diversify a court that was made up entirely of white men for almost two centuries. He chose an attorney who would be the high court's first former public defender, though she also possesses the elite legal background of other justices.

Jackson would be the current court's second Black justice — Justice Clarence Thomas, a conservative, is the other — and just the third in history. She would replace liberal Justice Stephen Breyer, 83, who is retiring at the end of the term this summer, so she won't change the court's 6-3 conservative majority.

Continued on next page



Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson speaks after President Joe Biden announced Jackson as his nominee to the Supreme Court in the Cross Hall of the White House, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022, in Washington. Associated Press

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Continued from Front

Jackson would join the court as it weighs cutbacks to abortion rights and will be considering ending affirmative action in college admissions and restricting voting rights efforts to increase minority representation.

She would be only the sixth woman to serve on the court, but she would join three others already there, including the first Latina, Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

In brief remarks, Jackson thanked Biden, saying she was "humbled by the extraordinary honor of this nomination." She highlighted her family's first-hand experience with the entirety of the legal system, as judges and lawyers, an incarcerated member and police officers.

Standing alongside Biden at the White House, she spoke of the historic nature of her nomination, noting she shared a birthday with Constance Baker Motley, the first Black woman to be confirmed to the federal bench.

"If I'm fortunate enough to be confirmed as the next associate justice of the Supreme Court United States, I can only hope that my life and career, my love of this country and the Constitution, and my commitment to upholding the rule of law and the sacred principles upon which this great nation was founded, will inspire future generations of Americans," Jackson said.

Jackson, 51, once worked as one of Breyer's law clerks early in her legal career. She attended Harvard as an undergraduate and for law school, and served on the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the agency that develops federal sentencing policy, before becoming a federal judge in 2013. Her nomination is subject to confirmation by the Senate, where Democrats hold



Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson prepares to speak after President Joe Biden announced Jackson as his nominee to the Supreme Court in the Cross Hall of the White House, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

the majority by a razor-thin 50-50 margin with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tie-breaker. Party leaders have promised swift but deliberate consideration of the president's nominee.

The news comes two years to the day after Biden, then struggling to capture the Democratic presidential nomination, pledged in a South Carolina debate to nominate a Black woman if presented with a vacancy. "Everyone should be represented," Biden said then.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said in a statement that the panel will "begin immediately" to move forward on consideration of an "extraordinary nominee." Senators have set a tentative goal of confirmation by April 8, when they leave for a two-week spring recess. Hearings could start as soon as mid-March.

That timeline could be complicated by a number of things, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the extended absence of Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico, who suffered a stroke last month and is out for several weeks. Democrats would need Lujan's vote to confirm Biden's pick if no Republicans support her.

Once the nomination is

sent to the Senate, it is up to the Senate Judiciary Committee to vet the nominee and hold confirmation hearings. After the committee approves a nomination, it goes to the Senate floor for a final vote.

Biden and Senate Democrats are hoping for a bipartisan vote on the nomination, but it's unclear if they will be able to win over any GOP senators after bitterly partisan confirmation battles under President Donald Trump. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of three Republicans who voted to confirm Jackson to the appeals court last year, had pushed Biden to nominate a different candidate from his home state, Judge J. Michelle Childs, who also was favored by home-state Rep. James Clyburn, a Biden ally.

Graham said earlier this month that his vote would be "very problematic" if it were anyone else, and he expressed disappointment in a tweet Friday that Biden had not nominated his preferred choice. Previewing a likely Republican attack line, he and several others on the right said Biden was going with the choice of the "radical left."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said he looked forward to meeting

with Jackson and "studying her record, legal views and judicial philosophy." But he noted he had voted against her a year ago.

Biden has said he was interested in selecting a nominee in the mold of Breyer who could be a persuasive force with fellow justices. Although Breyer's votes tended to put him to the left of center on an increasingly conservative court, he frequently saw the gray in situations that colleagues were more likely to find black or white.

"Justice Breyer — the members of the Senate will decide if I fill your seat," Jackson said, praising the retiring justice's "civility, grace, pragmatism and generosity of spirit."

"But please know that I could never fill your shoes," she said.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said, "With her exceptional qualifications and record of evenhandedness, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson will be a justice who will uphold the Constitution and protect the rights of all Americans, including the voiceless and vulnerable." The historic nomination of Judge Jackson is an important step toward ensuring the Supreme Court reflects the nation as a whole.

As part of his search process, Biden, a longtime chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, also interviewed Childs and California Supreme Court Judge Leandra Kruger, according to a person familiar with the matter. He also consulted with a wide range of legal experts and lawmakers in both parties and delved deeply into the finalists' legal writings.

Jackson serves on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, a position that Biden elevated her to last year from her previous job as a fed-

eral trial court judge. Three current justices — Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh and John Roberts, the chief justice — previously served on the same appeals court.

Jackson was confirmed to that post on a 53-44 Senate vote, winning the backing of three Republicans: Graham, Maine's Susan Collins and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski. In one of Jackson's most high-profile decisions, as a trial court judge she ordered former White House Counsel Don McGahn to appear before Congress. That was a setback to Trump's efforts to keep his top aides from testifying. The case was appealed, and a deal was ultimately reached for McGahn's testimony.

As an appeals court judge, she was part of a three-judge panel that ruled in December against Trump's effort to shield documents from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Jackson was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Miami. She has said that her parents, Johnny and Elery Brown, chose her name to express their pride in her family's African ancestry. They asked an aunt who was in the Peace Corps in Africa at the time to send a list of African girls' names and they picked Ketanji Onyika, which they were told meant "lovely one."

Jackson traces her interest in the law to when she was in preschool and her father was in law school and they would sit together at the dining room table, she with coloring books and he with law books. Her father became an attorney for the county school board and her mother was a high school principal. A brother, nine years younger, served in the Army, including in Iraq, and is now a lawyer, too. □

Report: Feds should create guidelines on less-lethal weapons

By MICHAEL BALSAMO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal government should study how police use less-lethal weapons, like tear gas and bean-bag guns, and offer guidance to law enforcement agencies across the U.S. because officers are often left with little information beyond the manufacturer's guidelines, according to a new report by one of the country's leading police research groups.

The report—being released Friday by the Police Executive Research Forum, an organization dedicated to improving the professionalism of policing — examines how police departments handled the thousands of protests and civil unrest in the U.S. in the summer of 2020, after George Floyd was killed at the hands of officers in Minneapolis.

The report offers 38 recommendations for police departments about how to handle demonstrations, civil disturbances and the violence that occurred during the unrest. It is based on interviews with police chiefs, reviews of after-action reports and an analysis of intelligence and other police reports. The recommendations include improving training, avoiding mass arrests, improving communication both internally within police forces and to the community during demonstrations and conducting robust reviews after large-scale protests. But the report also examines the use of less-lethal weapons and points specifically to the need to study their use and for police forces to have a playbook to follow — something the report notes has been sorely lacking for years. Now, the group is recommending the Justice Department's research arm, the National Institute of Justice, begin examining their use and offer resources to law enforcement agencies about when and how to use the weapons.

The use of such weapons, like tear gas, pepper balls, flash bangs and smoke



Police occupy the scene after a Louisville Police officer was shot during protests over a lack of charges against Louisville police in Breonna Taylor's death, Sept. 23, 2020, in Louisville, Ky.

Associated Press

bombs, became a flash-point in the debate over policing in 2020 after dozens of incidents of protesters and members of the media being struck by projectiles or caught up in clouds of tear gas unleashed on mostly peaceful crowds.

Tear gas has commonly been used as a defensive tool by law enforcement to make rioters disperse. But during the nationwide protests in 2020, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies sometimes used it offensively and in some cases directed it at large crowds with peaceful protesters, as opposed to individual people committing violence.

"All of those kinds of things, pepper spray, CS gas, bean-bag rounds, rubber bullets, in many cases, departments had not used that kind of equipment in some time," said Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum. "And

the key part of it is, in the after-action reports, significant concern about how and when the police deployed these less-lethal weapons."

The group started to examine whether there were guidelines or standards for the use of less-lethal weapons, and while some police departments have developed their own policies around when to use such force, many are left with only the manufacturer's guidelines, Wexler said.

The report recommends the National Institute of Justice "conduct significant research on this to determine the limitations and best practices of this kind of equipment," he said.

"There is no there is no playbook that exists today for American police in using this kind of equipment," he said.

In city after city, police chiefs reported that as protests grew, they were seeing something they had not seen in decades of

handling protests — by day, the crowds were huge but largely peaceful and at night, there was a significant escalation in violence during the demonstrations. During the demonstrations, protesters and others reported serious injuries after police used less-lethal weapons on crowds, including broken bones, traumatic brain injuries and temporary blindness after being struck by projectiles fired by officers.

A photographer covering a protest in Minneapolis was blinded in one eye after being shot in the face by a rubber bullet. A television reporter in Louisville, Kentucky, was hit by a pepper ball on live television by an officer who appeared

to be aiming at her. The Justice Department has since launched sweeping civil rights investigations to examine the practices of the Minneapolis and Louisville police departments, including their response to protests.

Police officers across the country were also injured when they were hit by bottles, rocks, bricks and cans of soup that were hurled at them in crowds.

The report also notes that even so-called soft projectiles "can cause serious or even fatal injuries, and can be difficult to target."

The report also recommends that police provide clearer directions for protesters when ordering them to disperse from an area. In addition to providing advance notice that they will be using force, the report advises police to give specific directions, like ordering protesters to exit onto particular streets or leave a park through a certain exit, along with a deadline.

In Lafayette Square, outside the White House, protesters who were forcefully removed by police before then-President Donald Trump walked to a church near the White House for a photo op, reported they did not hear U.S. Park Police order them to disperse before federal officers unleashed a flurry of smoke bombs and pepper balls on the peaceful crowd.

Wexler said he has spoken with Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, who oversees a slew of Justice Department offices, including the National Institute of Justice, and that she was receptive to the recommendation and said examining these issues is a priority for the Justice Department.

The Justice Department did not make Gupta available for an interview. □

To our readers and clients: In lieu of the Carnival celebrations, Aruba Today will not be published on Monday, February 28th, 2022. We will resume normal operations on Tuesday, March 1st, 2022.

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House panel requests Trump WH records from National Archives

By FARNOUSH AMIRI

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional oversight committee sought additional documents Friday from the National Archives related to former President Donald Trump's handling of White House records as the panel looks to expand its investigation into his handling of sensitive and even classified information.

The House Committee on Oversight and Reform sent a letter to the archivist, laying out a series of document requests needed to determine if the former president violated federal records laws when he took 15 boxes of White House records to his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida after leaving office last year.

The committee needs additional documents and information uniquely available from the National Archives and Records Administration "to investigate the full extent of this conduct and determine what additional steps, including potential legislative reforms, may be needed to ensure the preservation of presidential records for the American people," Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., the chairwoman of the Oversight Committee, wrote in the letter.

Among the items requested is a detailed account of the contents of the more



People wait for a moving van after boxes were moved out of the Eisenhower Executive Office building inside the White House complex, on Jan. 14, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

than a dozen boxes recovered by the archives from Mar-a-Lago, all presidential records Trump had attempted to destroy, communication records made on personal devices and unofficial messaging systems between White House aides including former chief of staff Mark Meadows, counsel Don McGahn and lawyer Pat Cipollone. The committee is also requesting documents and communications during Trump's term in office related to the preservation or destruction of social media records, including direct

messages from those in his orbit, such as daughter and adviser Ivanka Trump; lawyer Rudy Giuliani's son, Andrew Giuliani; and top aide Kellyanne Conway.

The archivist, David Ferriero, had responded to the House committee's request last week, disclosing that classified information was among the items taken by Trump to his Florida home and that some records recovered were torn up and taped back together.

While the Presidential Records Act bars the removal of classified documents to unauthorized locations, it is

possible that Trump could try to argue that, as president, he was the ultimate declassification authority. Trump, a Republican, has continually denied reports about his administration's tenuous relationship with the National Archives and said last Friday that "the National Archives did not 'find' anything, they were given, upon request, Presidential Records in an ordinary and routine process."

He added, "If this was anyone but 'Trump,' there would be no story here."

The letter comes after the committee learned that

certain social media records were not captured and preserved by the Trump administration and that staff frequently conducted official business using unofficial messaging accounts and personal phones without copying or forwarding them to be captured as an official record under the records law. Maloney has indicated her commitment to "uncovering the full depth of the Presidential Records Act violations by former President Trump and his top advisors," as the lawmaker sees the committee's oversight powers as having direct legislative jurisdiction over the records law and has had a long history of conducting similar oversight probes.

House investigators will be looking to see if Trump's actions, both during his presidency and after, violated the Presidential Records Act, which was enacted in 1978 after former President Richard Nixon wanted to destroy documents related to the Watergate scandal. The law mandates that presidential records are the property of the U.S. government, rather than belonging to the president. A statute, punishable by up to three years in prison upon conviction, makes it a crime to conceal or intentionally destroy government records. □

Treasury: Most COVID rental aid went to low-income residents



Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., speaks during a House Financial Services Committee hearing, Sept. 30, 2021 on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

By **MICHAEL CASEY and FATIMA HUSSEIN**
WASHINGTON (AP) — More

than 80% of the billions of dollars in federal rental assistance aimed at keeping

families in their homes during the pandemic went to low-income tenants, the Treasury Department said. It also concluded Thursday that the largest percentage of tenants receiving pandemic aid were Black followed by female-led households. In the fourth quarter of 2021, Treasury found that more than 40% of tenants getting help were Black and two-thirds of recipients were female-headed households. The data was consistent with what Treasury saw throughout the year.

"This is money that flows from Treasury to every state and territory in the country,

and we really have seen a real focus on delivering these dollars," said Noel Andrés Poyo, the deputy assistant secretary for Community Economic Development at Treasury. "It has been encouraging from my point of view to see states that are very diverse and to see these agencies lean into something really hard, it was really tough to stand up these programs, this data reflects where the need was."

According to the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, those most likely to face eviction are low-income women, especially women of color. Domestic violence

victims and families with children are also at high risk for eviction.

"It's really encouraging to see so much of the rental assistance reaching those most in need: women, Black renters, and low-income households in particular," Peter Hepburn, a research fellow at the Eviction Lab, said. "These are the groups that face highest risk of eviction and who were most severely affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic. They're the ones that this money was meant to help." Lawmakers approved \$46.5 billion in Emergency Rental Assistance last year. □

NATO leaders agree to bolster eastern forces after invasion

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts agreed Friday to send thousands of troops backed by air and naval support to protect allies near Russia and Ukraine in response to President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade, the organization's top civilian official said. Speaking after chairing a NATO summit, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the 30-nation organization will send parts of the NATO Response Force and elements of a quickly deployable spearhead unit to the alliance's eastern flank. It's the first time the force has been used to defend NATO allies.

Stoltenberg did not say how many troops would be sent or where they might go, but he did confirm that the move would involve land, sea and air power. In response to Europe's biggest security crisis in decades, Stoltenberg said, "We are now deploying the NATO Response Force for the first time in a collective defense context. We speak about thousands of troops. We speak about air and maritime capabilities."

"There must be no space for miscalculation or misunderstanding. We will do what it takes to protect and defend every ally, and every inch of NATO territory," he said.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during a media conference after convening an online NATO leaders summit at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

The NRF can number up to 40,000 troops, but Stoltenberg said that NATO would not be deploying the entire force. Parts of a spearhead unit known in NATO jargon as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, which is currently led by France, will also be sent.

The announcement came after NATO members, ranging from Russia's neighbor Estonia in the north down around the west of conflict-hit Ukraine to Bulgaria on the Black Sea coast, triggered urgent consultations Thursday about their security amid concerns from the

invasion.

"We will continue to take all measures and decisions required to ensure the security and defense of all allies," the leaders said in a statement. "We will make all deployments necessary to ensure strong and credible deterrence and defense across the alliance, now and in the future."

The world's biggest security organization previously had around 5,000 troops stationed in the Baltic countries — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — and Poland, but has significantly beefed up its defenses over the

past three months.

Some of NATO's 30 member countries are supplying arms, ammunition and other equipment to Ukraine, but NATO as an organization isn't. It won't launch any military action in support of Ukraine, which is a close partner but has no prospect of joining.

The Baltic members, however, have said the West should "urgently provide Ukrainian people with weapons, ammunition and any other kind of military support to defend itself as well as economic, financial and political assistance

and support, humanitarian aid."

NATO began beefing up its defenses in northeastern Europe after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Recently, some members have also sent troops, aircraft and warships to the Black Sea region, near allies Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

Short-term, NATO has also activated an emergency planning system to allow commanders to move forces more quickly. The Pentagon said Thursday that it is sending 7,000 troops to Europe in addition to 5,000 recently deployed personnel. NATO surveillance aircraft have begun patrols inside allied territory. The planes would be able to watch Russian fighter jet and transport movements inside Ukraine, much as they monitored aircraft in Syria from Turkey's airspace.

Lithuania declared a state of emergency Thursday. It borders Russia's Kaliningrad exclave to the southwest, Belarus to the east, Latvia to the north and Poland to the south.

The Baltic country's move allows for a more flexible use of state reserve funds and increased border protection, giving border guards greater authorities to stop and search individuals and vehicles in border areas. □

Ukraine crisis worries Lebanon over its wheat reserves

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon has wheat reserves sufficient for one month at the most, with Ukraine accounting for up to 60 percent of the crisis-hit country's wheat market, the economy minister said on Friday.

Concerns about wheat reflect the rippling effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Lebanese government is in talks with other countries like the United States, India and Canada to provide wheat amid concerns of global disruption to wheat supply during the crisis, Amin Salam said.

Ukraine is one of the largest exporters of wheat in the world, accounting for

around 12 percent of global supply, according the U.S. department of Agriculture.

Many countries like Lebanon depend heavily on wheat imports to provide subsidized bread to its population.

Only about a month's worth of wheat can be stored at a time in mills as a result of the August 2020 blast that destroyed the country's port, shredded its grain silos and killed over 200 people. And as the country is grapples with its own financial crisis, fears are growing about whether Lebanon can continue to subsidize wheat imports with soaring

prices caused by Russia's invasion.

Lebanon's economic crisis has left around two thirds of the population of 6 million, including 1 million Syrian refugees, to live in poverty. "Lebanon's bank could say that they are completely incapable of continuing subsidies or I give you only a certain amount and anything above we cannot continue," Salam said. Salam urged the Lebanese public to not panic by buying bread as supplies will continue for the next month.

"Last week, we signed off on a number of ships that will cover the market for



Minister of Economy and Trade Amin Salam, speaks during a press conference in Beirut, Lebanon, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

the next month or so. So please do not panic that

the bread will be cut off tomorrow." □

UNICEF chief: Taliban committed to let girls back to school

By **SAMYA KULLAB**

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

— The Taliban are showing "commitment" to allowing Afghan girls to go to school across the country next month, addressing a key condition set by the international community, UNICEF's newly appointed chief said on Friday.

UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said it remains to be seen whether the Taliban's commitment to reopening schools to girls and women on March 21 might hinge on more conditions or restrictions.

"The de-facto (Taliban) authorities have given us indications that that is their intention, and we are hopeful that is going to happen, and we believe it should happen," Russell, who was appointed earlier this month, said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press in the capital of Kabul.

Despite the lack of a formal ban, girls grade seven and up have effectively been barred from going to school in most of the country since the Taliban's takeover of the country six months ago. Access to education is a key demand of the international community, and the Taliban have blamed delays on lack of adequate space, especially in cities,



Catherine Russell, UNICEF's executive director, speaks during an interview with the Associated Press, in Kabul, Afghanistan, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

to accommodate segregated schooling.

Schools in about 10 provinces have continued uninterrupted since the Taliban takeover and private universities and schools in the capital remained open. Universities for women have also restarted in several provinces with the Taliban promising all universities will do so eventually in the coming weeks.

Apart from reassurances that schools will re-open for all girls, little else has been made public about other

possible restrictions or curriculum changes. These are "a little bit of a work in progress," Russell said.

With Afghanistan as her first visit, Russell met with Taliban officials this week to discuss concerns ranging from child health and rights to education, she said - in particular the mounting threat of acute malnutrition and access to education. The United Nations, along with international organizations, face mounting challenges to addressing Afghanistan's growing hu-

manitarian crisis. The U.N. projects this year that over 1 million children will need treatment for malnutrition and up to 97% of Afghans could be living below the poverty line. A landmark UNICEF \$2 billion appeal to donors for aid is only 17% funded.

At Kabul's Indira Gandhi Hospital for Children, wards are packed with mothers from across the country seeking treatment for their malnourished babies.

Zermina Mohammed said she didn't have the 1,000

afghanis (\$10) needed to pay for medication. She begged a relative in the Puli-Charki area of Kabul for the money. But she still needs more, she said as she cradled her sick baby.

As poverty deepens, billions of dollars in Afghanistan's foreign assets remain inaccessible to the still-unrecognized Taliban government. The once-aid dependent country is unable to pay public sector workers, including in the health and education sectors.

Donors and NGOs have had to step in to foot the wage bill. At the Indira Gandhi hospital, crowds of hospital staff gathered to pick up wages. The money was being doled out by the International Committee of the Red Cross, according to hospital director Mohammed Iqbal Sadiq.

On the education front, funds from the European Union are paying teacher salaries, Russell said. But the system is by no means a long-term solution, Russell said.

"Ultimately, the international community has got to try and come together to work with the de-facto authorities here to do this together," she said. "It's not something that humanitarian organizations can solve on their own." □

U.N. body weighs a global treaty to fight plastic pollution



A man walks on a mountain of plastic bottles as he carries a sack of them to be sold for recycling after weighing them at the dump in the Dandora slum of Nairobi, Kenya on Dec. 5, 2018.

Associated Press

By **WANJOHI KABUKURU**

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP)

— Delegates from United Nations member countries are

considering proposals for a binding global treaty to curb plastic pollution.

The U.N. Environment Assembly, meeting Feb. 28

to March 2 in Kenya's capital Nairobi, is expected to propose an international framework to address the growing problem of plastic waste in the world's oceans, rivers and landscape.

"For the first time in history, we are seeing unprecedented global momentum to tackle the plague of plastic pollution," said U.N. Environment Program Executive Director Inger Andersen.

During preparations for the session, Andersen implored member states to take the opportunity to reshape humanity's "relationship with plastic once and for all" by developing a comprehensive global agreement to combat the problem.

Two major proposals have emerged during years of international discussions about ways to reduce single use plastic.

The first, by Peru and Rwanda, calls for a full spectrum approach to plastic pollution, covering raw materials extraction, plastic production, as well as plastic use and disposal. It urges creation of "an international legally binding agreement ... to prevent and reduce plastic pollution in the environment, including micro plastics."

The proposal is co-sponsored by Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Norway, the Philippines, Senegal, Switzerland, the

United Kingdom and Uganda along with the European Union.

A second proposal, sponsored by Japan, calls for an international agreement "to address marine plastic pollution covering the whole life cycle and promoting resource efficiency and circular economy," including reuse.

The key difference is that Japan's approach concentrates on marine plastic pollution, while the Peru-Rwanda proposal covers plastic pollution in all environments.

Both proposals envision establishment of a negotiating committee to complete the new plastic treaty by 2024. □



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Honduras high court rejects house arrest for ex-president

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) — Honduras' Supreme Court of Justice on Thursday denied the appeal of former President Juan Orlando Hernández to be held under house arrest during his extradition process.

Hernández was arrested Feb. 15 at the request of U.S. authorities. He faces charges of drug trafficking, using weapons for drug trafficking and conspiracy to use weapons in drug trafficking.

A judge ruled on Feb. 16 that Hernández be held at a National Police special forces base in the capital pending the outcome of the extradition process.

The judge handling his case denied his attorneys' request for house arrest last week and scheduled a court session March 16 to hear evidence supporting the U.S. charges.

But his attorneys appealed and Thursday the full Supreme Court of Justice convened and voted 14 to 1 to deny his appeal for



Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, center in chains, is shown to the press at the Police Headquarters in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Tuesday, Feb. 15, 2022.

Associated Press

home confinement.

Since his arrest, Hernández's wife has pleaded his case to the National Human Rights Commission and before a national commission against torture and cruel treatment. She said his human rights were violated in the way

he was publicly exhibited and in the conditions of his confinement. She also held two vigils with his supporters outside the base where he is being held.

U.S. prosecutors in the Southern District of New York have accused Hernández in recent years

of funding his political rise with profits from drug traffickers in exchange for protecting their shipments. Hernández has vehemently denied the accusations. He has said drug traffickers he helped capture and extradite are seeking revenge by making up stories.

Hernández's two-term presidency ended Jan. 27 with the swearing in of President Xiomara Castro. Hernández became a representative of Honduras in the Central American Parliament.

Last week, police surrounded Hernández's home a day before his arrest. Once the judge issue an arrest warrant, Hernández was taken into custody, shackled at the wrists and ankles and paraded in front of cameras. □

Magnitude 6.2 earthquake kills 7 on Indonesia's Sumatra

PASAMAN, Indonesia (AP) — A strong and shallow earthquake shook Indonesia's Sumatra island on Friday, killing seven people and injuring 85, while causing panic on the island and in neighboring Malaysia and Singapore.

The magnitude 6.2 earthquake struck about 66 kilometers (41 miles) north-northwest of Bukittinggi, a hilly town in West Sumatra province, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. It was centered about 12 kilometers (7.4 miles) below the Earth's surface.

At least four people, including two children, were killed in Pasaman district and three people died in the neighboring district of West Pasaman. At least 410 houses and buildings were damaged, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency said.

More than 5,000 people fled their homes to temporary shelters, mostly in devastated areas of Pasaman and West Pasaman districts, agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said in a statement.

"We are still focusing on

search and rescue efforts for the victims," Muhari said. Authorities were still investigating the full extent of the damage. People ran out of their houses looking for safer places when the earthquake struck, said Ahmad Nur, a resident of Talamau village in West Pasaman district. He said he was preparing to open his shop in a nearby market and returned home to check on his family. His house was damaged and his wife was in pain because her leg had been hit by debris, he said. □



Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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Time to invest: Premium condominium and house prices in Aruba are going up

Are these costs reflected in the condominium and house sales prices?

"Not yet but will sooner than later. After a market analysis of construction costs and behavior of condominium prices in the Caribbean and the US it is clear to me sales prices will increase shortly. Why?"

Historically prices in Aruba have been 15% lower than Brickell-Miami; now they are 40% lower, and that gap will eventually close. In South Florida there are many factors for this price hike; people moving from NYC and California, low interest rates, better climate, the trend of a flexible workplace with the possibilities opened by the likes of Zoom and Google Meet, Blackstone and others, private equity funds buying residential real estate, higher construction costs, Latin Americans moving in driven away from socialist/communist regimes and so on.

And many of these factors should and will affect Aruba real estate prices as well. Workation and the trend of flexible workplaces is certainly one of them more so with 14 daily flights from/to the US. Aruba is safe, has the best infrastructure in the Caribbean and a much better climate and beaches than for example South Florida. By the way, not many people know this, but Aruba has the best internet in the Caribbean.

- Covid pretty much under control.
- A lot of outdoor space to roam around and with a great and sunny weather.
- Construction costs are already 25%-30% higher and sales prices have not adjusted (yet).
- Resale of Inventory by Venezuelans that bought as a weekend getaway eager to sell as they emigrated given the political circumstances will be reduced in this coming winter season.
- Very few oceanfront lands left for new condo developments and a moratorium for new condos in place. A simple equation of supply and demand."

What are you doing about it?

"Unfortunately for us we have very little inventory left for sale but will certainly increase prices as other developers are already doing. Pre- Covid prices are history."

We see another clear trend on longer stays, a high demand for premium houses and villas that are selling like crazy as people want to remain private (only one left at The Villas – Azure Beach Residences). Also, for townhouses with private pools, ground floor units and Pent Houses with the possibility of turning one room into an office. Contrary to my previous belief I even think there is room for oceanfront multi-million-dollar houses. Build them and those super rich will come. In the case of Harbour House we created a Co-Working space with all the services that has been a hit among buyers as even though they want to work from afar in their dream destination they want to socialize, have a good coffee and a quiet place to work away from the family running around in their condo."

Any final advice?

"Hurry up!! Look for experienced developers with a good track record. Take advantage of the low interest rates and remember that investing in real estate is all about location, location, location; stay close to the Ocean."

For any questions you can always contact:

Blue Aruba Realty
+1 297 5946395 | +1 888.927.3471
SALES@BLUEARUBAREALTY.COM

EAGLE BEACH — Alberto Perret Gentil is the VP International Operations for the Pering Group, a 70 year old real estate development company with 20 years already in Aruba and four exclusive projects under their belt, all with beautiful ocean views and great amenities: Oceania Residences, Blue, Azure Beach Residences and Harbour House.

We catch up with Gentil inspecting the final details on the construction of The Villas at Azure Beach Residences.

We hear construction prices are increasing. What is your take?

"Construction costs have increased in the last year close to 28% for various reasons. Mainly factories closed worldwide due to Covid and caused a disruption in the sup-

ply chain with port capacity constraints in China among other places. The increase in materials and labor; steel prices through the roof due to lower production, trade wars, Canada not exporting wood to the US, less labor available given the subsidies and more restriction in immigration and a very long process etcetera.

Also because of higher demand for goods as people stayed home during the pandemic without going out and spending on entertainment/restaurants and thus have more disposable income to buy stuff. Just to give you an idea; a container from China now costs \$22,000 vs \$5,500 previously. And on top, import duties in Aruba include the (increased) freight cost in its calculation (CIF value)."

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National lights parade

**ORANJESTAD** - The preparations for the National Lights Parade that will take place on February 26, 2022, is being made.

As part of the preparations, the Minister of Culture Xiomara Maduro and the National Days Celebration Commission held a meeting with the different stakeholders involved with the lighting parade. These stakeholders include the Police Department, IMSAN, the Red Cross, the Department of Public Works, and Serlimar.

The stakeholders received the briefing and rules for the national lights parade. The streets on the parade route will be closed at 6 p.m. by the DOW, the safety of the public and participants will be in the hands of 125 police officers. Serlimar is responsible for maintaining the entire route of the parade clean.

As we reported previously, Aruba

will celebrate Carnival on the 26th of February with a National Light Parade organised by CCDN, to start getting accustomed to normality again while also celebrating our culture.

The theme of this parade will be the 4 colors of the Aruban flag, which are red, yellow, white and blue. There will be 6 groups participating in our National Light Parade, namely Empire, Majestic, Infinity, Dushi, Pink for Life and Royal Carnival Group. There will be renowned local bands performing like D'licious, NBO, Upgrade Music & Jeon, Youth Xtreme, Le Groove and Buleria.

The parade will be from 8pm to 2am, starting at Aruba Entertainment Center in Dakota, goes thru Vondellaan, L.G. Smith Boulevard and finish at the old department of infrastructure (DOW) building near Citgo Boulevard. □



Covid Test Center at Paseo has the best experience!

PALM BEACH - Don't spend a single moment of your long awaited holiday in Aruba thinking about your return testing. The Covid Test Center Aruba located at the Paseo Herencia Mall is your travel ally. Just sit back and relax knowing that, when the time comes, their professional staff will make this process a breeze for you. No need to make an appointment or dread the nasal swab; you'll be done with it in a matter of minutes and back to fun stuff.

Some regions require proof or certification of negative COVID-19 status before allowing people into or out of the country. With rules and guidelines varying greatly from country to country, the safest approach is to have recent proof you are COVID-19 negative before you get to the airport. Covid Test Center @ Paseo provides both PCR and Antigen type testing with results within hours; and both are accepted by the CDC.

Covid Test Center @ Paseo is conveniently located at the Paseo Herencia Mall in the heart of the Palm Beach Strip and right across from the Playa Linda and Holiday Inn hotels; only two doors from T.G.I. Friday's. We are open seven days a week, between 9 am and 9 pm. This gives you the choice to walk in when it better suits you. It can be at the start or at the end of your day. No appointment needed here.

The friendly technicians at Covid Test Center @ Paseo will take your information as we are aware it is imperative that this shows accurately on the results. For a seamless process, please verify that you have provided



the correct email to deliver the certificate. Said certificate can be printed at our offices should you wish to do so.

We understand that nobody enjoys doing a nasal swab. That is why we take pride in our reputation of being the gentlest swabbers on the island. First, we will not rush you just to go to the next in line. Through clear given instructions we want you to feel comfortable. When you are ready, we will promptly but tenderly take a proper sample. Many elsewhere traumatized people praise the difference it makes to test with us. Forget about counting hours before your flight, our turnaround is fast! For travel to the US, for example, a day before will suffice. A great game plan is to test first, then head out for an evening of dining, shopping and entertainment at the Paseo Herencia Mall, home of the water and lights show in the evenings. By the time you are back at the hotel, your results will be ready in your inbox. A PCR test costs \$75 and results are ready the next day, while Antigen test costs \$35 with same day results. If you are staying at an off-high-rise area property, you can benefit from the free parking our customers receive at the mall lot.).

For more information follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. □



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More than \$150,000 in prizes

The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba launched its amazing campaign: Mega Win Luxury Vacations!

PALM BEACH — The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba just launched its amazing campaign: Mega Win Luxury Vacations! This campaign starts on February 1st till April 30th, 2022, where they will raffle dream vacations to the newest hotels in the Caribbean: The Ritz-Carlton, Turks and Caicos and The St. Regis Bermuda Resort. They will also raffle dream vacations to The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba and more prizes amongst their visitors.

All members of The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba can participate in this campaign starting February 1st till April 30th. There will be 3 drawing dates: February 26th, March



- 3 x vacations for two persons to The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba
- 21 x slot credit prizes for a total of \$52,500

The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba keeps innovating by bringing exciting campaigns for their visitors who are always surprised and excited to participate. Additionally, The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba offers a thoughtfully-tiered player reward program called 'Elevate', featuring exclusive benefits and events for members. Members can earn points for both slot machines and table games and receive cash redemption from slot machine points, while accumulated table comps can be redeemed towards enjoying the hotel's celebrated amenities, including complimentary rooms nights, dining, and spa.

The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba is known as the island's luxury casino where guests enjoy exceptional personalized service, a great selection of table games and state-of-the-art slot machines for a casino experience like no other.

For more information about the Mega Win Luxury Vacations Campaign, the Elevate Tier Program and other promotions, visit us at The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba VIP Desk or call us at 527-2276/ 527-2277 and we will be delighted to assist you. ☐

Aruba Today launches amazing campaign



ORANJESTAD — As a token of appreciation to all our readers and followers, Aruba Today launched a Like, Share, Tag & Win Campaign which started on February 16 and will last up till April 6, 2022.

Prize:

Win a weekend stay at Caribbean Palm Village for 4 persons. Price can be redeemed from April 16th till Dec 2022.

What to do:

Step 1: Like the facebook page of Aruba Today
Step 2: Tag 2 friends in the comments box
Step 3: Share the campaign post on your timeline (public)

Winner will be announced

on **Wednesday April 6, 2022** thru our facebook page.

Remember to follow all 3 steps. Increase the odds of winning by sharing the post as much as possible.

About Caribbean Palm Village

Caribbean Palm Village Resort provides guests with a quiet, peaceful and serene environment perfect for relaxing the mind and body and rejuvenating the heart and soul. The resort is conveniently located within just minutes from major restaurants, grocery stores, nightlife and beaches. Caribbean Palm Village Resort is your perfect destination for fun and sun. ☐

26th and April 30th. A total of 10 finalists will be selected on each drawing date and will qualify through the raffle tickets in the raffle box and through the MVP (Most Valuable Player) promotion. To participate is very easy: you need to be a member of The Casino VIP Club. For every 80 points you accumulate on slot play and every \$40 dollars in Theoretical Win on table play you will receive one ticket. In addition you have the option to receive one free raffle ticket to participate by visiting one of our Restaurants at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba. With every dinner purchase at Casa Nonna New York and BLT Steak, you will receive a voucher to participate. Simply present the restaurant voucher together with the dinner receipt at the Casino VIP Desk on the same night to redeem your raffle ticket.

The prizes for this promotion will be as follows:

- 3 x vacations for two persons to The Ritz-Carlton, Turks and Caicos
- 3 x vacations for two persons to The St. Regis Bermuda Resort



Prices are up everywhere with inflation. Except in my 401(k)

By STAN CHOE
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Inflation does not discriminate. Just like it's squeezing everybody's wallet, it's hitting almost every investment in a retirement account.

Stocks have been shaky this year, with the S&P 500 at one point dropping more than 10% from its record, mostly because of inflation worries. Bond prices have also tumbled. Before gold's recent spurt due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the metal with a reputation as an inflation protector was coming off its worst year in the last six, even though inflation surged to the highest level in generations.

The reality is that no perfect playbook exists for how to invest in a high-inflation world. But many on Wall Street do see areas of the market that could hold up better than others, if not outright succeed.

It marks a turnaround for investors, who got used to years of low inflation that didn't dent their earnings very much, said Gargi Pal Chaudhuri, head of iShares Investment Strategy, Americas, at investment giant BlackRock. "Going forward, I think that level that used to be 1.5% to 2% is likely to be closer to 3%, and you need to start thinking about where you can move," she said.

That doesn't mean investors need to start day-trading their retirement accounts, after a long-term buy-and-hold strategy worked so well for years. But they may want to shade their portfolios in certain directions, including parts of the stock and bond markets that can actually benefit from inflation. Here's a look at some of the options:

— BONDS LESS THREATENED BY INFLATION

Bonds are supposed to be the safe part of anyone's portfolio. But when inflation is high, the fixed payments they'll make in future years will buy less stuff.

Expectations keep rising for how many times the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates this year to slow inflation, with prices for



The New York Stock Exchange is seen in New York, Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022.

Associated Press

consumers 7.5% higher in January than a year earlier. When rates rise, newly issued bonds pay more, and the bonds already sitting in bond funds' portfolios suddenly look less attractive, forcing down their prices. Vanguard's Total Bond Market Index fund has already lost 4.2% this year, as of Thursday.

It may be a shock to lose money on bonds, but investors shouldn't abandon them, Chaudhuri said. "At the end of the day, the bonds are still giving you that ballast," she said. "They are still that ultimate diversifier that will still work in an environment where stocks are going down significantly."

Higher rates typically hit the longest-term bonds harder, because they lock investors in at lower rates for longer. Shorter-term bonds can offer some protection.

The U.S. government offers some bonds that protect against rising prices. When an investor buys Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities, also called TIPS, the principal rises and falls over time with the consumer price index. So do the interest payments based on that principal amount. The downside is that TIPS are still offering negative yields, with the 10-year TIPS recently around negative 0.50%.

Another type of bond from the government, called an I-bond, may be more lucrative.

It pays interest made up in two parts: one that rises and falls with inflation, which resets twice a year, and another that's set when the bond is purchased. I-bonds available now are paying nothing on that second part, but the first is so high that they're currently paying a composite annual rate of 7.1%. These bonds also come with limits, though, and can't be cashed out for a year. Investors also lose three months of interest payments if they cash out before five years.

— COMMODITIES THAT CAN SPARKLE

Some commodities have performed well during high-inflation periods over prior decades. Surprisingly, gold isn't always one of them.

Its price fell about 4% last year, even when inflation was accelerating quickly. And it yo-yoed through early 2022, before worries

about Russian aggression against Ukraine sent it surging.

"Once inflation is already high, gold's hedging power is not as strong" against inflation, said Rich Weiss, chief investment officer, multi-asset strategies, at American Century Investments.

That may be because the Fed's usual medicine for high inflation - higher interest rates - can hurt gold. When bonds are paying more in interest, investors may be less willing to park their money in gold, which pays them nothing.

Other commodities have had stronger track records. "That's almost tautological," Weiss said, because rising prices for oil and other commodities are often some of the main reasons for inflation spikes.

Some on Wall Street suggest considering investments that track a broad range of commodities, such as some specialty ETFs, though they can have higher expenses than stock and bond funds.

— STOCKS THAT RISE WITH INFLATION

If prices for oil and other commodities are rising with inflation, so likely will the prospects for the companies that are producing them. That's why several strategists suggest focusing on energy stocks in particular.

Within the S&P 500, energy stocks have surged more than 22% this year, when the overall index is down a little more than 8%.

Other areas of the market that look relatively less expensive are also likely better bets in a world with high inflation and rising rates, say strategists at UBS Global Wealth Management. Stocks that look expensive, such as big tech stocks following their strong yearslong run aided by low interest rates, are likely to get hit harder.

Financial stocks haven't been hit as hard as the rest of the market this year because higher long-term rates are raising expectations for bigger profits from making loans. But even there, risk remains. Banks tend to make the most money when they can borrow money cheaply at short-term rates and lend it out at more expensive long-term rates. If that gap closes, they may be set for pain.

Stocks from emerging markets have also shown well in past instances of high inflation, in part because many of those companies are producers of commodities. They also look cheaper than the U.S. stock market, which has been the world's dominant force for years.

"COVID has prevented us from traveling overseas physically," American Century's Weiss said, "but you definitely want to start traveling overseas with your assets." □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 37 Pot start
1 Cantina snack
7 Thailand, once

11 Pal of George and Jerry
12 Visitor to Siam

13 Eye part
14 Horse healers

15 Macramé makeup
16 Michener book

17 Big rig
18 Garment with laces

19 Morning's end
21 Pot part

22 Took an evasive course
25 Lively spirit

26 Approximating phrase
27 Tack on

29 Pack down
33 Incline

34 Ballpark feat
35 Royal address

36 "In Cold Blood" author

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Yesterday's answer

DOWN
1 Bottle parts
2 Without aid
3 Billiards shot
4 Suggesting indirectly
5 Till section
6 Neptune's domain
7 Rescued
8 Banished
9 Tummy relief

10 Gathered in a group
16 Salad servers
18 Get on UV stopper
22 Ride on a cable
23 Subjects of tariffs
24 Deteriorate

25 Lowly worker
28 Some swords
30 Love, to Luigi
31 Poet's concern
32 Iron
34 Visibility lessener
36 Bounder

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2-26

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-26 **CRYPTOQUOTE**

GW QREA KWYEK ZWW DRJD.

RO DS KWYEK NRZD DRK WNG

NRGJK. — NRTRYL QTYVS

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IF YOU HAVE NO ENEMIES, YOU ARE APT TO BE IN THE SAME PREDICAMENT IN REGARD TO FRIENDS. — ELBERT HUBBARD

'The Desperate Hour' is a film lost in the woods



This image released by Roadside Attractions shows Naomi Watts in a scene from "The Desperate Hour."

Associated Press

By MARK KENNEDY
AP Entertainment Writer

To say Naomi Watts is the only star in "The Desperate Hour" is a little misleading. She's pretty much the only person in the film, that's true. But you could make the case that she has a co-star in her iPhone.

Watts spends most of "The Desperate Hour" furiously typing, listening, consulting, pleading or otherwise glued to her smartphone as it takes on an outsized importance. Alone and lost in the woods, it's her only lifeline to the world.

Watts plays Amy Carr as the first anniversary of her husband's death approaches. She has a young daughter and a sullen, depressed teenage son. She goes on a five-mile jog into a forest and then finds out there's been a shooting at the local school. The film's meat is her harrowing hour of not knowing what's happening in gut-twisting worry.

As an acting exercise, it's intriguing — barely any scene partners and all unfolding in real time. As a film, not so much: After a plodding,

placid start, it goes from first gear into fifth and never relents as the woes pile on.

It turns out watching an hour of Watts breathing heavily as she runs and gets more frantic, her eyes ever widening, isn't that much fun. At one point, Watts' character rolls her ankle, forcing her to limp the rest of the way. You might roll your eyes. Method limping. Director Phillip Noyce squeezes out every possible trick to keep us interested. There are high, overhead shots of Watts running through colorful trees and shots of her looking upward from the dirt path. The camera sometimes swirls around her face like a wasp and ominous music swells.

In some ways, "The Desperate Hour" could be seen like an 84-minute commercial for the iPhone, as our heroine flips from FaceTime to live TV, one-touch Contacts, listens to music through earbuds, opens the Lyft or Instagram apps, checks locations on her satellite map, or relies on Siri's robotic calmness. ("Starting

route. Take Rosewood Trail for half a mile," it chirps.)

But, in other ways, the film is as anti-technology as you can get, revealing that the apparent order promised by those rows of colorful apps on your home screen is just an illusion. Unwanted calls interrupt, connections are dropped, GPS can fail, live TV needs buffering, voicemail boxes get filled and, sometimes, simply no one answers.

Watts at one point screams in pure frustration — a feeling anyone who's ever owned a phone will recognize. "Please stay on the line to speak to our next available operator," says one of the recordings that sets her over the edge. In another scene, those three dots signaling someone is writing a text maddeningly disappear. The crisis reveals to Carr people who are really friends. A random car mechanic proves heroic, but a close pal going through the same crisis reveals a lack of empathy. The 911 dispatchers are amazing, maybe a little too amazing. "I might just be a voice on the other end of this line, but I'm here for you," one says. "You did what any other mom would do."

Carr might be lost in the woods, but any viewer by the halfway mark will know exactly where Chris Sparling's increasingly melodramatic script is headed. We don't need GPS to know that her family will be connected to the shooting and a ham-fisted attempt to speak about gun violence will be made. The moment she starts playing detective out there in the woods pushes the film past belief. It's a movie that could only be made now, with us dependent on our smartphones but they not always proving to be as smart as we'd like. Maybe that all changes with 5G, but here, there are long scenes in which a sweaty, panicked lady is just poking at her phone and swearing like a sailor. How her battery — or any viewer — lasts until the end is a mystery. □

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CDC to significantly ease pandemic mask guidelines Friday

By ZEKE MILLER

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration will significantly loosen federal mask-wearing guidelines to protect against COVID-19 transmission on Friday, according to two people familiar with the matter, meaning most Americans will no longer be advised to wear masks in indoor public settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday will announce a change to the metrics it uses to determine whether to recommend face coverings, shifting from looking at COVID-19 case counts to a more holistic view of risk from the coronavirus to a community. Under current guidelines, masks are recommended for people residing in communities of substantial or high transmission — roughly 95% of U.S. counties, according to the latest data.

The new metrics will still consider caseloads, but also take into account hospitalizations and local hospital capacity, which have been markedly improved during the emergence of the omicron variant. That strain is highly transmissible, but indications are that it is less severe than earlier strains, particularly for people who are fully vaccinated and boosted. Under the new guidelines, the vast majority of Americans will no longer live in areas where indoor masking in public is recommended, based on current data.

The new policy comes as the Biden administration moves to shift its focus to preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19, rather than all instances of infection, as part of a strategy adjustment for a new "phase" in the response as the virus becomes endemic.

The two people familiar with the change spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the CDC's action before the announcement.

The change comes as nearly all U.S. states that had put



A sign requiring masks as a precaution against the spread of the coronavirus is posted on a store front in Philadelphia, on Feb. 16, 2022.

Associated Press

in place indoor mask-wearing mandates for the winter omicron surge are letting them lapse as cases have precipitously dropped nationwide. Some have eliminated the mandates entirely, while others have kept mask-wearing requirements in place for schools and medical facilities.

It was not immediately clear how the new CDC guidance would affect U.S. federal mandates requiring face coverings on public transportation.

The CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, has said a change has been in the works.

"We must consider hospital capacity as an additional important barometer. Our hospitals need to be able

to take care of people with heart attacks and strokes. Our emergency departments can't be so overwhelmed that patients with emergent issues have to wait in line," she said during a White House briefing last week.

However, she declined to give a specific day when the CDC would announce a change. CDC officials on Thursday refused to confirm a release date.

"At @CDCgov, we have been analyzing our #COVID19 data and shifting our focus to preventing the most severe outcomes and minimizing healthcare strain," Walensky tweeted Thursday night, offering no details on Friday's announcement. □



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Week 5/1315 (19k);
Week 8/1113 (18k);
Week 8/1409 (18k);
Week 9/1218 (16k);
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New No. 1 Medvedev: Watching Russia-Ukraine news 'not easy'

By **CARLOS RODRIGUEZ**

AP Sports Writer

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP)

— As much as Daniil Medvedev cared about taking over the No. 1 ranking in men's tennis, he knew there were more serious matters happening Thursday involving his home nation of Russia.

A loss by Novak Djokovic at the Dubai Championships meant that the Serbian player would move down to No. 2 and Medvedev was assured of becoming the 27th man to hold the top spot in the ATP — even before Medvedev reached the semifinals by winning his match at the Mexico Open.

It all happened on the same day that Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine that began with air and missile strikes on military facilities before troops and tanks rolled across borders from the north, east and south. "Watching the news from home, waking up here in Mexico, was not easy," Medvedev said after beating Yoshihito Nishioka 6-2, 6-3. "By being a tennis player, I want to promote peace all over the world. We play in so many different countries; I've been in so many countries as a junior and as a pro. It's just not easy to hear all this news. ...



Daniil Medvedev of Russia returns a ball during a match against Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan in the quarterfinal of the Mexican Open tennis tournament in Acapulco, Mexico, Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022.

Associated Press

I'm all for peace."

Medvedev noted that the pair that won the doubles title at the Marseille Open last week included one Russian (Andrey Rublev) and one Ukrainian (Denys Molchanov), saying: "This was amazing, because people need to stay together."

Reflecting on the day, Medvedev added: "In these moments, you understand that tennis sometimes is not that important. ... It was not easy to play and I'm happy that I managed to win the match, but it was bit of a

roller-coaster day for me."

The 26-year-old Medvedev, who won last year's U.S. Open for his first Grand Slam title, said he received congratulations from other players about his new ranking, which will become official on Monday.

"Of course, I'm happy to reach No. 1," Medvedev said. "It was my goal since I was young."

He will face Rafael Nadal in the semifinals of the hard-court tournament. Medvedev lost to Nadal in the Australian Open fi-

nal in January after blowing a two-set lead, a year after losing the final there against Djokovic.

"Always playing against the Big Three or Big Four, it's an honor, and a great challenge. In Australia (against Nadal), I could have won, but the result in the end was that I lost," Medvedev said. "It was a tough loss, but that's how sport is."

Nadal beat Tommy Paul 6-0, 7-6 (5) to improve his record to 13-0 on the season. Nadal is a three-time Acapulco champion where he

has a 23-2 record.

"(Medvedev) is a tough opponent, the No. 1 in the world and we all saw in Australia how hard is to beat him", Nadal said. "I'm aware that I need to be at 100% to have a chance, but I'm looking forward to it, it will be demanding, but I hope to be ready".

Nadal also expressed his thoughts on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"I can give an opinion as a citizen," Nadal said. "I don't want to talk about who is to blame, but for me it's unbelievable that there are wars at this moment. I can't comprehend it and I wish for it to end now, because at the end of the day I think it's devastating and incomprehensible news."

In other results, Stefanos Tsitsipas also moved on to the semifinals with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Marcos Giron. The third-seeded Tsitsipas will play Cameron Norrie, who advanced by beating Peter Gojowczyk 6-1, 6-0. Defending champion Alexander Zverev was kicked out of the tournament after violently hitting the chair umpire's stand with his racket following a loss in doubles.

Zverev was fined \$40,000 and will forfeit more than \$30,000 in prize money and all rankings points from the Mexican Open. □

Islanders' Chara breaks NHL record for games by defenseman



New York Islanders defenseman Zdeno Chara waves to the crowd as he is acknowledged for breaking Chris Chelios' league record for games played by a defenseman, during the first period of the team's NHL hockey game against San Jose Sharks in San Jose, Calif., Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022.

Associated Press

By **JOE STIGLICH**
Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Zdeno Chara broke the

NHL record for games by a defenseman Thursday night.

The seven-time All-Star was on the ice for the New York Islanders for the opening faceoff against San Jose for his 1,652nd regular-season game. He broke the mark set by Hall of Famer Chris Chelios.

"I would like to start by thanking Chris Chelios," Chara said after New York's 4-3 shootout loss. "He set such a high standard for many of us. It's been very inspiring and a huge motivation. I want to thank him for that. ... I'm very lucky that I get to still play this game."

Chara received a standing

ovation from the SAP Center crowd and waved in acknowledgement when his feat was announced during a stoppage of play. The Sharks also played a videotaped message of congratulations from former San Jose forward Patrick Marleau, who holds the NHL record for games by any player.

The Slovak star, the tallest player in NHL history at 6-foot-9, is in the twilight of a decorated career that began in 1997 when he was just 20. He's now three weeks shy of his 45th birthday, and he signed a one-year deal with the Islanders before this season to reunite with the team he be-

gan his career with.

Chara even challenged the Sharks' Jeffrey Viel to a fight in the second period as they exchanged punches and fell to the ice.

"He got involved with someone who was acting up a little bit," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "He fought, and our bench got some energy from that."

Chara won the Norris Trophy as the league's best defenseman in 2008-09 while with Boston. Two seasons later, he served as captain of a Bruins team that won the Stanley Cup. He also spent time with Ottawa and the Washington Capitals during his 24-year career. □

Berger shoots another 65, moves atop Honda leaderboard

By TIM REYNOLDS

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Daniel Berger

no longer needs to answer questions about how his back feels. The scorecard is telling the story.

Berger — playing what amounts to a home tournament for him, with his residence a 15-minute drive away in Jupiter — was the early leader through two rounds of the Honda Classic, after shooting a second consecutive 65 on Friday to move clear of the field before the afternoon wave of players took the course.

"You get your mom's cooking, you get to sleep in your own bed," Berger said. "It's pretty comfortable."

Chris Kirk also made an early move on Friday, with his round of 68 getting him to 7 under for the week and three shots off Berger's pace.

Berger's 10-under 130 is tied for the third-lowest score through 36 holes since the Honda moved to PGA National in 2007; Aaron Wise was 12 under through two rounds last year, Rory McIlroy was 11 under at the midway point in 2014 and Brendon De Jonge was 10 under that same year.

None of them went on to win. McIlroy lost in a playoff to Russell Henley, Wise shot 75-73 on the weekend to finish tied for 13th and De Jonge went 76-78 on the weekend to freefall all the way to a tie for 63rd.

That said, Berger is showing no signs of trouble so far this week. And Honda just suits him; he's had a pair of top-five finishes here in six previous starts, including finishing second to Padraig Harrington in a Monday playoff to decide the winner in 2015.

"Every tournament I play in I want to win," Berger said. "But it would be especially nice to win here having so many friends and family here with me this week. But you just can't focus on that. You've just got to take it a shot at a time and really just stay patient because it is such a challenging golf course."

Berger had a five-birdie, zero-bogey opening round

on Thursday and was nearly as flawless on Friday, with six birdies and one bogey. The only stroke he gave back was on the par-3 15th, his sixth hole of the day, when his tee ball landed in a bunker and he wound up missing a 15-foot par putt.

If his lead holds — and with PGA National's traditional wind expected to pick up in the afternoon, it certainly might — it would be Berger's first 36-hole lead in a PGA Tour event since the Travelers Championship in August 2016. He is a four-time winner on tour, most recently at Pebble Beach in 2021.

But the back issues that flared up in recent weeks kept him from playing Pebble this year and defending that title. He played the



Daniel Berger watches his shot from the 16th tee during the second round of the Honda Classic golf tournament, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022, in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Associated Press

Phoenix Open two weeks ago, testing his back and declaring afterward that he would be good to play at PGA National — a place where he played a ton

of junior golf — and get a home week at the Honda. So far, so good. Very good, in fact.

"It took actually longer than I thought it was to feel bet-

ter," Berger said. "Six, seven years ago I felt like I could have broken my ankle and 10 days later I would have been fine. But I'm getting older now and even at 28 I don't feel the way I used to feel, shockingly, but that's thousands and thousands of golf swings later, so it's just part of the job."

Among those going off in the afternoon wave Friday were first-round leader Kurt Kitayama, who was 6 under in Round 1, and another Honda fan favorite and South Florida native, Brooks Koepka.

DIVOTS: Louis Oosthuizen, the highest-ranked player in the field at No. 13 in the world, rallied for a 65 on Friday — 10 shots better than his opening round — and got to even-par 140. □

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